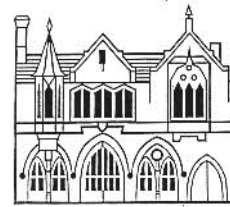


The Citizen



Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association
Working for the social and civic life of our community

June 2009

Chairman's Column

Our Chairman, Tony Statham, writes -

As I have said in the past, it is neither my intention nor the policy of the BCA to take any political stance on matters of local interest. Consequently when a “hot potato” appears on the menu one is inclined to toss it quickly over to someone else. I refer to the controversial plan to add a second level to part of the Station car park. I attended most of the public consultation meeting at which objections and/or support was offered for this scheme. Most of those opposing the extra deck are naturally residents of Bridgewater Road and I can understand their concerns. The “green lobby” has some merit in trying to limit further use of cars although in reality cars won't go away. London Midland Rail countered that extra parking spaces should encourage more people to use the train.

Personally, I have often thought that a second level to the Station car park would be eminently sensible as a practical solution to the generic parking problems that plague much of the town. Admittedly fixed or lower charges to park here should be considered, especially at weekends. Many of our Victorian and Edwardian Streets with both large and small houses were built for residents without cars (or horses) and the growth of private car use has taken parking availability to its limit with no opportunity to expand it. The only other potential idea is to revamp the Water Lane car park but this will stagger through months (years?) of local authority anguish before it can become a reality. A debate for another time might be an extra level at Lower Kings Road and/or Waitrose? Let us accept that the well-screened second level at the station will give us a welcome benefit to the town.

AGM & ENVIRONMENT AWARDS 2009

Our Vice-Chairman, Susan Johnson, reports:

The AGM took place with me in the Chair (the Chairman being on holiday) on 1st April; appropriately. It should have taken place on 12th March, but the lights went out. The reorganised date was the first we could get in the Great Hall; we felt it best to stick to the usual venue when the date had changed rather spectacularly. However it was a good night, despite the inauspicious circumstances.

The Environment Awards are always the selling point of the night. This year the panel awarded the Plaque to 12 Torrington Road for its splendid attention to detail and quality of materials in what could have been a run-of-the-mill infill development. The runner up was Stoney Close on the Northchurch border – a real gem of a social housing development. The two other awards were for preserving aspects of the town's historic fabric – at either end of the scale: the Great Barn in Castle Hill, and the Victorian entrance door next to Dickman's the Chemist. Such efforts do so much to enhancing our environment.
(Award presentation pictures on page 3)

The speaker of the evening was from the West Herts NHS Hospitals Trust, who was promoting the idea of the Trust taking on Foundation status. Much has been written on this elsewhere, so I will not elaborate. Suffice to say that her exposition was met with less than enthusiasm from the floor, although we are grateful for her time in taking the trouble to explain the situation. One bizarre aspect – the

Trust is evidently promoting ‘membership’ for ordinary citizens by offering gifts and prizes. Before your imagination runs away with you (free hip replacements??) it turns out these consist of the usual jute shopping bags. Puzzled expressions all round!

The AGM would not have been complete without the invitation to members to join the Committee. We have a few spaces and always welcome interest. If you feel you would like to become more involved, please get in touch to arrange to ‘sit in’ on one of our meetings.

Finally, the AGM was sorry to hear of the death this year of one of our longest-serving members and former Chairman, George Cameron. In recognition of his service the BCA has granted life membership to his widow, Vera. Our good wishes go to her and her family.

THE ENVIRONMENT AN UPDATE

Talk by David Brown on 2nd April

David, ably assisted by Danny Bonnet, gave us a fascinating insight into the latest thinking on climate change and the efforts of the Transition Towns movement to bring it to wider attention. The Berkhamsted Transition Town organisation is offering a lot of information and events to widen knowledge and enlist support for action. The talk was less well-attended than it might have been due to the proximity of the re-arranged AGM, but 30 members enjoyed an interesting evening.

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones, Chairman, reports:

Summer Events

This year's Summer Ramble is to Cholesbury and back, on Sunday June 7th. Join us, as usual, at 10.30 am in front of Berkhamsted Station or along the footpath to Shooter's Way between 10.30 and 10.45 am. There will be a stop for lunch in Cholesbury or bring your own picnic. Walkers take part at their own risk.

Bill Willett is trying to organise a visit to Redbournbury Watermill and Bakery for sometime in July. We will be using own transport or lifts, if possible, at travellers' own risk. If you are interested, look out for posters in July and we shall try to contact those who gave their names to Susan Johnson at the AGM.

New Programme

We open, on Thursday, October 8th, with "Designing a Winning Garden for the Chelsea Flower Show". Janet Honour, who lives in Berkhamsted, and her colleague, Patricia Thirion were invited to design a courtyard garden for the Chelsea Flower Show a couple of years ago, when they had just finished a course at Capel Manor. They won a silver gilt medal and will tell us about their experiences.

This is followed on Thursday, November 12th by Robert Aigin, of 'Nomad' in Castle Street on "The Identification of Oriental Rugs". He will be happy to answer questions; so if you want to know more about a rug, do bring it along.

2010 starts with "Red Kites in the Chilterns", an illustrated talk by Phil and Ann Farrer, on February 11th, followed on March 11th, by the AGM and Environment Awards. Tony Statham, finding more time after his term as Chairman, promises to explain "World Finance" on April 8th.

A varied programme, so I hope you will find something of interest and will join us in the Sessions Hall (Great Hall for the AGM) at 8pm. We hope to have two rambles, on January 1st and June 6th.

Your Editor gets to say.....

Norman Cutting has a view (as usual!)

Picking up on our Chairman's report on the additional parking to be provided for commuters at the station, at the AGM a member actually agreed with my comments in the last issue regarding our 'little parking difficulties'. Now, this really isn't the point. I can't have members agreeing with my views otherwise there would be no point in actually pointing out the blindingly obvious.

Whilst in the same subject (parking at the Station - come on, keep up!) as I write this, I hear that Lord Adonis, the Transport Minister, actually tried to use public toilet facilities on some of Britain's railway station platforms. For some reason he was not impressed, so immediately decided to fix the problem by appointing a couple of people to sort it out. One of which is actually a member of our very own Association and been involved in the railway business for many years.

It never ceases to amaze me that the 'nuffin to do wiv me, gov!' attitude continues even to this day in so many areas. Even I have got involved, in my own little way.

Dacorum Hospital Action Group

Norman Cutting represents the Association

Although everything is working as planned, services improved, plenty of staff and facilities both at the new super Watford General Hospital and the 24 hour 'Urgent Care Centre' and 12 hour 'surgery' in Hemel Hempstead (according to the West Herts Hospital Trust!), reports coming into both the Gazette and DHAG suggest that lack of staff and facilities may meet budget requirements, but 'customers' are being failed and I thought they were the purpose of the NHS.

The very week I am writing this piece, we have have the very long letter published in the Gazette from Jan Filochowski, Chief Executive of the WHHT, praising the transfer and how well everything is going and then the sad news that a body was found in the toilets of the Watford A&E facility having lain there for at least 3 days. Reality and management seem to be drifting apart if you believe the picture being drawn by the Trust.

The group has been going for over 30 years now and the assorted promises made by various health trusts (North West London to the present West Herts) are wearing a little thin. We nearly had a brand new hospital in 1972, but the Conservative government changed its mind and withdrew funding. Over the years, the land has been sold to fund the poor management regime and changes. Even the current Trust wants to bail out and pass the buck, but the Labour government has made the cunning plan of raising money from the private sector almost impossible and all but unaffordable.

The DHAG has formed a small select band of 'action men/women' to fight the irreversible decision to move the main health facility for the area to a cramped plot of land, almost inaccessible, next to an aspiring premier league football club and moribund town instead of an expanding large town with space available to improve and existing (for the present!) facility.

Continued just over here →

Parish Paths Partnership 23rd April 2009

Norman Cutting is our representative

This group administers a small annual grant of around £1000 per year to improve the local urban footpath network.

Last year, two kissing gates were installed on FP21A to replace existing stiles and make life easier for us old folks. Also last year, two benches were installed to provide views from footpaths 2 and 26 either side of the valley.

This year, a program of improving signage of the footpaths by providing both the number and destination – some have already been done – has been started.

We are looking to identify places where a footpath would improve routes to and from schools in the town such as the link between Upper Ashlyns Road and Kings Road, an improved route between Ashlyns School and Hall Park and the possibility of improving/adding to the path across the Berkhamsted School Chesham Road playing area. Some may recall the 'missing' Briar Way footpath, In 2007, the footpath officer agreed to do something about it. In 2008, Dacorum landscape dept., hacked down a large area of overgrown vegetation - and just stopped!. In May 2009 the mowing dept. have cut a swath right down to almost Woodlands Avenue. It's a start!

Ed - already some kind soul has dumped his/her grass mowings in the middle. Makes you want to weep!

Butts Meadow footpaths (south and east side) may come into the funding envelope shortly. Just as an aside, who else remembers the tarmac surface on the one alongside the allotments? Now an unwelcome soggy grass area in the wet!

Canal and Riverside Partnership 14th April 2009

Norman Cutting is also the Association's representative on this group

The quality of the 'improved' towpath surface should soon be actually 'improved'. The planned planting of flowers may happen – or not. Most of the canal side signs have been renewed/replaced apart from the very large one over the Ravens Lane bridge.

We are reviving the 'Interpretation Panel' questionnaire using the Internet and trying to encourage local schools to set aside part of their packed curriculum to learn about part of our local heritage.

The proposed Canal Fields footpath was discussed and it appears that no money is available to improve the drainage where the footpath is expected. However, new soakaways will be dug and the 'French drains' will be renewed, but no new pipework is proposed to take the water away. It was noted that Dacorum Borough Council had felled a tree without obtaining planning permission – needed in Conservation area. (Wot permission?, wot regrading?, wot puddles? was asked!). I just asked 'why?'.

2008 Environment Award Winners in pictures



The plaque was presented to Vic Elkington, architect of Johnson & Partners for 12-12c Torrington Road & York Court



A Certificate of High Commendation went to The Chilterns, Stoney Close, a development of social housing by Aldwych Housing Association. It was received by Patrick O'Sullivan.



The Great Barn, Castle Hill, received a Certificate commending its restoration and conversion, in recognition of its contribution to conserving Berkhamsted's heritage. It was received by Peter Newson, the architect of Peter Newson Associates.

Linden House, 224 High Street, received an award for its doorway restoration, which had also contributed to conserving Berkhamsted's heritage. Unfortunately no-one was available to receive the award.

The other week, one of the local school children was walking along the road, obviously getting to the end of his 'drink in a can', when he looked round to see where to put it. Nearest hedge was the obvious place and that is where it was pushed into. Only I was watching and shouted that it should go somewhere else. He actually turned round and pulled it out of hedge and put it into his pocket. See, it can be done!!

More residential bins, please, Dacorum.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

Earlier this year it was proposed that the Town Council would lose the automatic right to “call-in” planning appeals and have them referred to the development control committee. The Association and others objected and the right remains. As it is, very few applications are now considered by Borough Councillors.

One of the more contentious planning matters is the installation of a single storey metal extension to the railway station car park. *London Midland have postponed putting up the car park deck as we go to press!* As you may be aware there is no planning permission needed as it is a “deemed development” and in fact the installation is demanded as part of the franchise obligations between London Midland and the Department of Transport. I have seen correspondence from London Midland that they do what they can to mitigate the impact to nearby residents. There have been some modified plans to the New Lodge development and although we still support the scheme we still feel 30 mph would be better at the entrance to the town.

The footpath map is selling well and we will need a reprint in the next year. About 9000 in total have sold so they have been a great success.

Membership Matters

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby - Membership Secretary

In the May Newsletter last year, I reported that in the previous six months, 24 new members had joined up, taking our membership back to 450 household members. In some respects, this year could not be more different. We have had just 5 new members joining and with resignations and moving etc our membership is now down to 419.

On the more positive side, 42 were then outstanding. At present it is 32. If you are one of those, a third request will have been enclosed with this newsletter. If you have paid and have still been sent a reminder, please let me know. Thank you to the 199 who have renewed their membership for this year, 71 paying for three years. This saves having to send out yearly reminders.

Joining is not just going to meetings, or receiving newsletters, but it is to help us have an influence and a say. It is therefore very important that we maintain our membership because if it continues to fall we may no longer be listened to.

You know what the Citizens Association does. Please ask a friend and/or a neighbour if they are members. If not, encourage them to join by sending me £5 along with their name and address. It is as simple as that. It saves time and me not having to forward them a membership form. It would be marvellous if we could return to the level we were this time last year; 450.

LEARN ABOUT YOUR CANAL

David Hilling - a member of CARP writes:

Originally built for the movement of freight, the Grand Union canal has now become an important element in the recreational activities of Berkhamsted’s population. General exercise walking, dog walking, push-chair route, cyclists’ path, soon a fitness trail and a linear park with its own wild life – we are fortunate to have this amenity.

The tow path really is a well-used route and people frequently study the plinth-mounted information panels prepared by CARP to facilitate for youngsters the brass-rubbing of traditional canal-boat features and to impart to those of all ages something of the history of the canal and its relationship with the town. The former economic activities of the town - grain milling, the chemical industry, timber handling and processing, boat building – were based on the canal and Berkhamsted provided a concentration of freight handling unequalled over much of the Grand Union.

To further this interest in the canal/town relationship it is now possible to gain access from the town website (www.berkhamsted.gov.uk and follow the links) where there are some follow-up questions particularly useful for school children. These test their observation, suggest ideas for further activity (art work, modelling) and also raise questions related to the historical context and present day use of the canal and its environs. The whole idea is to show that the canal has done so much for the town, that we should learn all about it, make the most of it and, most importantly, look after it.

Ken Sherwood (1935-2009)

Ken Sherwood, distinguished member and past Chairman died on 6th April 2009.

The Association was represented at his funeral on 17th April.

We will publish an appreciation in the next issue.

Held over to next issue

It has been the normal practice to include a list of Committee Members together with list of Berkhamsted, Northchurch and Dacorum Councillors. It has been excluded partially because your committee remains unchanged, but also because pending the elections in June, we are unable to give you an accurate Council list.

Contributions/letters/comments to:

The Citizen

c/o 15 Chestnut Drive, BERKHAMSTED, HP4 2JL

E-mail: bca@berko.org.uk

Web site: <http://www.bcacitizen.org.uk>

Chairman: Tony Statham, Ashlyns Lodge, Chesham Road, HP4 2ST Tel: 876995 (e: sahs@tinyonline.co.uk)

Membership Secretary: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road, HP4 3EA Tel: 865882

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

Designed by Norman Cutting - 871851 & printed by The Print Centre - 876600